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RHMFISS/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC  
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHINGTON DC  
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SUBJECT: NORTHERN KAZAKHSTAN PROMOTES INTER-RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE FOR SOME

REFS: A. ASTANA 0010  
[1](#)B. ASTANA 0013  
[1](#)C. ASTANA 0023

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[1](#)1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

[1](#)2. (SBU) SUMMARY: During recent visits to Kazakhstan's Kostanai and North Kazakhstan Oblasts (refs A-C), officials, civil society representatives, and leaders of the Russian Orthodox and Islamic communities emphasized the regions' religious tolerance and inter-confessional harmony. However, they expressed concern about non-traditional religions. END SUMMARY.

OVER 90 RELIGIOUS HOUSES OF WORSHIP IN KOSTANAI

[1](#)3. (SBU) Noting the representation of over 90 houses of worship in Kostanai, Tatyana Zueva, a representative of the region's Internal Policy Department, praised its record of inter-religious harmony. With a large ethnic Russian and Slavic population (ref C), the sizeable Russian Orthodox community has two churches within Kostanai city, she underlined. During a weekday morning visit to the new cathedral, which replaced a smaller church next door, PolOff observed approximately 30 worshippers, men and women, young and old, praying. A Catholic cathedral, two mosques (one built with private money and one government-funded), and one synagogue -- opened during Israeli President Shimon Peres' July visit -- also populate Kostanai.

NO NON-TRADITIONAL MISSIONARIES

[1](#)4. (SBU) In response to PolOff's inquiry about missionary activity, Zueva said that Oblast authorities welcome all religious confessions. She added, "Fortunately, however, we do not have any non-traditional missionaries here now, as we did in the 1990's." Zueva claimed that non-traditional missionaries "bother people" by going door-to-door, selling books. "It is people's choice to open their door and admit such people, and, in Kostanai, we have such freedom, but I think we are better off without such religious activities." (NOTE: While Kazakhstan is proud of its record on religious tolerance, some Kazakhstanis are uneasy about a perceived threat from "non-traditional" religions, such as Jehovah's

Witnesses, Scientologists, and Hare Krishnas. END NOTE.)

#### ORTHODOX PRIEST PRAISES PROMOTION OF RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

15. (SBU) North Kazakhstan Oblast officials also praised inter-religious tolerance in their region, noting the presence of 34 confessions and 39 missionary groups. Accompanied by Faina Seryogina, Chief Specialist of Internal Policy Department of the North-Kazakhstan Oblast Akimat (regional government), PolOff met with Protopriest Sergiy, who reports directly to the Patriarch of Moscow and All the Rus. Responsible for the spiritual well-being of one-third of Kazakhstan's Russian Orthodox community, Protopriest Sergiy described excellent relations with the government and all other traditional religions in Kazakhstan. Sergiy praised Nazarbayev for his initiatives to promote inter-ethnic and inter-confessional harmony, in particular the July 2009 Congress of Leaders of Traditional and World Religions, held in Astana, which Protopriest Sergiy attended. He highlighted excellent relations with local imams and rabbis, and called the former imam a very close friend. According to Protopriest Sergiy, approximately 500 Jews live in North Kazakhstan Oblast. Protopriest Sergiy proudly showed PolOff Petrapavlovsk's most famous landmark, the Cathedral of Saint Peter and Paul, as well as a newer Orthodox church in another part of town. Both Russian Orthodox religious sites support large congregations and many charitable activities, he said. Protopriest Sergiy, however, expressed reservations about the growth of "missionary activity by non-traditional religions" in North Kazakhstan.

#### IMAM PRAISES TOLERANCE, BUT SAYS ISLAM IS UNDER-REPRESENTED

16. (SBU) Kasymkhan Isayev, North Kazakhstan Oblast's representative of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan and

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Chief Imam of the Kyzylzhar Center, recently moved to Petrapavlovsk from Zhambyl Oblast in southern Kazakhstan. He is responsible for the city's four mosques, which attract approximately 585 believers for weekly prayers. To accommodate growing numbers of worshippers, he said the Muslim community is now planning a fifth mosque. The city's largest mosque has a large cafeteria to provide food to the needy and cater to the halal dietary restrictions of worshippers, as well as several classrooms, which can accommodate up to 30 students.

Like Protopriest Sergiy, Isayev praised President Nazarbayev for encouraging tolerance and highlighted his excellent relations with other religious organizations in North Kazakhstan. Even though half the region's residents are Muslim, he argued that Islam remains under-represented because many "Muslims" in the region do not practice their ancestral faith. Isayev described his efforts to meet the needs of the Islamic community and increase understanding of Islam. Isayev, who appeared to be in his mid-forties, studied Arabic in Shymkent, and fluently speaks both Kazakh and Russian.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: In frank conversations with representatives of religious organizations and Akimats in Kostanai and North Kazakhstan Oblasts, PolOff's interlocutors unanimously praised the tolerant atmosphere of residents towards various religions, and government support for inter-confessional harmony. In both regions, new mosques, churches, and synagogues continue to be built, and irrespective of their religion, interlocutors said "Kazakhstani citizens feel free to practice religion." At the same time, the concern of religious representatives and local officials alike about the growth of "non-traditional" confessions reflects the national mood, which prompted the government to propose the restrictive 2009 draft religion law. END COMMENT.

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